



The [General Assembly Fourth Committee](#) is charged with addressing a variety of political and peacekeeping issues. Its political work covers aspects of decolonization, mine action and Palestinian refugee issues. Its recommendations should address political aspects of an issue and not focus on the economic, social or development aspect of the topic. For example, while the Fourth Committee may discuss the political problems of the Syrian Golan, it cannot discuss the details of how to promote development in the area, a task better suited for the Second Committee. The Fourth Committee is also charged with the coordination and operational aspects of United Nations peacekeeping missions and the oversight of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. This is an important distinction from the Security Council which develops peacekeeping missions and objectives.

Topics:

1. Assistance in mine action

One of the longest-lasting consequences of armed conflict is the continuing presence of landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW), including unexploded bombs, shells and cluster munitions. Landmines and other unexploded ordnance can [remain deadly](#) long after they have outlived their intended purpose, with the locations where they were dropped or planted often going unrecorded or forgotten and with the potential to explode at any moment. Rough estimates suggest that [as many as 110 million landmines](#) have been deployed worldwide, and between 1999 and 2017, landmines and ERW caused [over 122 thousand casualties](#). After 15 years of decline, with over 52 million APMs destroyed since 1999, the number of casualties from mines and ERW has increased significantly since 2013, due in large part to ongoing global conflicts. In 2019 [approximately 80 percent](#) of victims were civilians, 43 percent of whom were children. Mine contamination also presents [long-term social, economic and environmental challenges](#). Uncleared mines, both anti-personnel mines (APMs) and anti-vehicle mines (AVMs), limit access to humanitarian aid and pose risks to sustainable development. Survivors of mines and ERW blasts require medical care and may struggle to reintegrate into their communities.

Landmine casualties peaked in the 1990s, [with over 25,000 people killed annually](#) and [widespread deployment in conflict areas](#). In 1996, after failing to amend [Protocol II](#) of the 1980 [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) (CCW) to ban the use of landmines, Member States met in a series of conferences, [independent of the United Nations System](#), to produce a document banning APMs outright. These efforts resulted in the signing of the [Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction](#), also known as the Ottawa Convention or the Mine Ban Treaty, one year later. The Ottawa Convention prohibits States Parties from using, transferring or stockpiling APMs of any kind. States Parties are also required to clear landmines within their territory, provide services to mine victims and develop risk-reduction tools, such as mine risk education. The Ottawa Convention also commits States Parties to assisting other States Parties in the implementation of these requirements.

The adoption of the Ottawa Convention and the focus on mine action led to the rapid development of new regulations for other explosive ordnance. In

1997, the United Nations consolidated missions from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to [establish the United Nations Mine Action Service](#) (UNMAS), tasked with coordinating mine action work across the United Nations System. A group of Member States annexed a new [Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War](#) (Protocol V) to the CCW in 2005, designating States Parties as responsible for the tracking and clearance of ERW and increasing protections for civilians. Three years later, 30 States adopted the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#) (CCM), applying the framework used in the Ottawa Convention to cluster munitions; 110 States have now adopted the CCM.

In recent years, there have been [several positive developments](#) in mine action, including the elimination of several States Parties' APM stockpiles, increased gender parity in mine action and the increased integration of mine action into frameworks for national development and humanitarian programs. However, as traditional landmines have become less common, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have emerged in armed conflicts as [a more deadly and dangerous threat](#). Adopted in 2019, the [United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2019–2023](#) outlines three strategic outcomes: strengthening the protection of individuals and communities from the risks and socioeconomic impacts of explosive ordnance; ensuring that survivors, family members and communities affected by explosive ordnance have equal access to health and education and can participate fully in social and economic life; and ensuring that national institutions can effectively lead and manage mine action functions and responsibilities. Similarly, the [Oslo Action Plan 2019–2024](#) adopted at [the Fourth Review Conference](#) of the Ottawa Convention outlines 50 measurable action items intended to strengthen international cooperation and compliance with the Convention, including a particular focus on building capacity and allowing States Parties to take ownership of mine action.

While multilateral commitment to mine action is stronger than ever, challenges remain for implementation of mine action frameworks. Although there are now 164 States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, 32 United Nations Member States have still not signed. These States continue to use, stockpile or manufacture APMs and cluster munitions. [Concerns over lack of readiness for potential future conflict](#) hinder accession and implementation

efforts of the Ottawa Convention, and even within the jurisdiction of States Parties, [non-State actors still plant landmines](#) as part of ongoing conflicts. Even as significant progress on mine action has been made, [support for victims still lags behind](#). Moreover, as the world approaches the 2025 deadline for a landmine free world set in the 2014 [Maputo+15 Declaration](#), imbalanced funding support [risks leaving some Member States behind](#).

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- What can be done to help achieve universal adoption of the Ottawa Convention?
- How can the United Nations adapt its mine action programs to changing threats such as IEDs, ERW and increasingly urbanized conflict?
- What can the United Nations do to build capacity within individual Member States to manage their own mine action programs?

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II. Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Decolonization remains central to the United Nations' mission of protecting the rights of all peoples, and it endures as one of the United Nations' [greatest success stories](#). Lack of self-government limits the ability of territories to choose their own political, economic and social destinies, leaving them dependent on administering Powers that are often far away and [indifferent to domestic concerns](#). In 1946, the United Nations created [a list of 72 territories](#) that it considered "non-self-governing" as defined by [Article 73 of the United Nations Charter](#). Today, [only 17 territories](#) remain on the list, representing approximately 750 million people around the world who have gained self-determination. However, [recent progress has been slow](#): only one territory, Timor-Leste, has been removed from the list since 1994, while another territory, French Polynesia, [was readded in 2013](#).

Decolonization can be a delicate process: no two territories gain independence in the same way, and even successful efforts can result in turmoil. The [independence referendum in Timor-Leste](#) was met with mass violence which led to a United Nations peacekeeping mission and a three-year-long transition of power between Indonesia, the United Nations and the new government. This transition highlights the challenges of the period surrounding independence, including the development of new government institutions and economic systems, the risks of backlash from anti-independence forces and the necessity of international support.

In addition to defining Non-Self-Governing Territories, Article 73 of the United Nations Charter directs colonial Powers to help support territories in the process of achieving some form of self-determination. In particular, Article 73(e) requires the administering Power of a Non-Self-Governing Territory to submit yearly updates regarding its social and economic conditions for United Nations review. As former colonies were quickly becoming new Member States, in 1960, the General Assembly updated the

Charter's definition of "Non-Self-Governing Territory" with [a list of criteria](#) and adopted the [Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples](#). The Declaration reiterated the necessity of allowing people in Non-Self-Governing Territories the freedom [to fully pursue their political, social, economic and cultural rights](#), defining colonization as contrary to those goals and those of the United Nations Charter. It also warned against any attempts to suppress, divide or use force against Non-Self-Governing Territories, all strategies historically used against territories seeking self-governance.

Shortly thereafter in 1961, the General Assembly established the [Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples](#) (C-24). The C-24 is responsible for reviewing the progress of the Declaration and providing recommendations on transitional issues as territories realize self-governance. Since 1963, it has been responsible for reviewing the yearly updates from administering Powers required under Article 73(e) and reporting on them to the General Assembly Fourth Committee. This process was largely successful between 1963 and 1984, a period in which roughly two-thirds of Non-Self-Governing Territories were removed from the initial list after gaining independence, joining another State or being determined to no longer meet the criteria for non-self-governance. However, no territories achieved self-determination between 1984 and 1990. In recognition of the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration, and noting this slowdown, the General Assembly in 1988 declared the period from 1990 to 2000 as the [International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism](#), with a corresponding plan of action. The plan, intended to hasten the rate of decolonization, laid out proposals for action for the international community, including United Nations specialized agencies, administering Powers and other Member States. As the pace of territories' removal from the list continued to slow, this was followed by the [Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism](#) from 2001 to 2010, with a revised plan of action based on the lessons learned from the preceding decade, and the [Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism](#) from 2011 to 2020.

In 2020, the General Assembly established the decade from 2021 to 2030 as the [Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism](#). Having seen no new progress, it called on the international community to continue implementing the plan of action adopted during the Second Decade while urging administering Powers to cooperate with the C-24 in coordinating the self-governance of current Non-Self-Governing Territories. Although the General Assembly has maintained a strong focus on implementation of the Declaration, outside observers [have criticized the C-24 and the Fourth Committee](#) for not taking more decisive action to accelerate the decolonization process.

As the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism begins, it remains to be seen what progress the United Nations will be successful in making regarding the status of any of the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories, as significant challenges remain in successful implementation of the Declaration. Significant disagreement exists over the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories itself, with the C-24 and Fourth Committee routinely hearing debate about [adding](#) or [removing](#) territories. Meanwhile, experts speaking to the C-24 have expressed that Non-Self-Governing Territories often have [limited knowledge of the self-determination options](#) available to them, and that the perception of a lack of desire for self-determination from these territories may be better understood as a lack of information. At the same time, Non-Self-Governing Territories continue to experience lack of self-determination while remaining [highly susceptible to external events](#), including natural disasters, rising sea levels and [the COVID-19 pandemic](#). The effects of these challenges are magnified by the economic impacts from limited resources and lack of control over their own economies. Without more diplomatic progress from administering Powers or the C-24, the need for a Fifth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism may be inevitable.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- What steps should the United Nations take to fully implement the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples?

- How can the United Nations improve the availability of information regarding self-determination options for Non-Self-Governing Territories?
- What obstacles prevent the international community from making significant further progress on decolonization?

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